9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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CHAPTER XVII

FESTIVALS AND FAIRS: THE COUNTRY TOWN.

Although the Celtic year began with All Hallows Day (November 1st), for our purpose we may regard it as starting on February 1st, or St. Bridget's Day. This was the first day of Spring, and of field work, for the Saint promised that every second day thereafter would be hard and dry. The circle of the year ran its course through the seasons, punctuated by certain fixed festivals and by the uncertain advent of births, marriages, illness and death. It is with the fixed festivals that we are concerned in this chapter. The four seasons have their opening days on the first of February, May, August and November, and the celebration of these days and the preceding Eves is a pagan survival breaking through the Christian calendar. The festivals of February and of November have been taken under the special protection of the Church through their association with St. Bridget and All Saints, but many traces of the "elder faiths" of nature worship live on, sanctified by tradition if not always by the Church.

On St. Bridget's Eve (January 31st) it is customary for country children to pull rushes—they must not be cut with a knife—and take them home to be made into crosses by the family gathered round the fire. A fixed ritual, varying from one district to another, determines the procedure, and it traditionally included the St. Bridget's supper of pancakes or sowens taken from a plate laid on top of a rush cross. The

221 796 805 [821] [996]
221 796 788 285
[p.153]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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crosses, of various patterns, are hung up over doors and beds and in the byre to bring good luck. Some of them are very elaborate, but the oldest style, to judge from its Celtic form, is the three-legged cross (Fig. 106) which is specially associated with cattle and is not, like the other shapes, taken to church to be blessed, a ceremony which is kept up even in parts of Belfast. In the Glens of Antrim a small bed is fashioned out of rushes and placed by the fire on St. Bridget's Eve: the door is left unlatched so that the Saint may come in and rest.

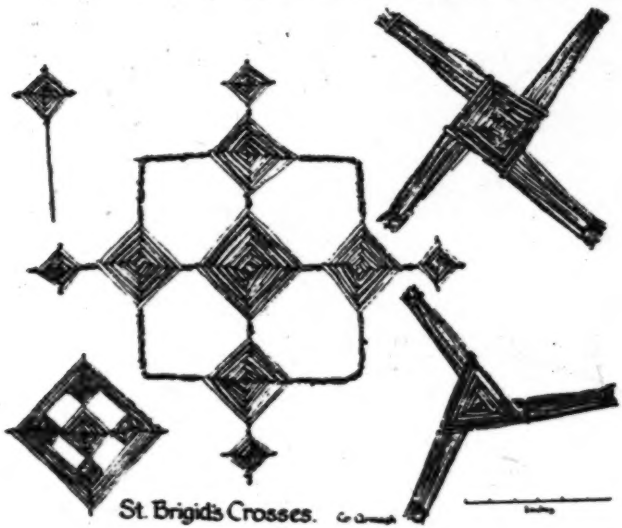

Fig. 106.

In Co. Kerry young lads called "Biddy Boys" wear hats of straw on the first of February, and in other parts of the west, I am told, "Bridget Belts" of plaited straw are worn.

The next important day in the calendar comes about the middle of the three months of Spring, that is at the time now kept as a national holiday in North and South alike—St. Patrick's Day, March 17th. This is regarded as the proper time to commence sowing, and the countryman counts on

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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CHAPTER XVIII

SOME CUSTOMS AND BELIEFS. I.

With the many material survivals from the past which we have mentioned in earlier chapters there lives on an imposing body of customs and superstitious beliefs of which we can attempt to give no more than a summary description. They concern not only the visible world with its common elements and events—water, fire, stones, salt, iron, trees, cattle, crops, harvest, food and drink, birth, marriage and death—and the relics of former ages—raths or "forths," great stone monuments, stone axes, flint arrowheads, spinning whorls and "crocks of gold"—but also the unseen or rarely glimpsed world of giants, fairies and other beings. All the major processes of the farmer's year had their appropriate magic rites which clung to them from the beginning. Many of these superstitions are so deep-rooted that centuries of opposition from the Christian Church have failed to suppress them, and while it has driven some practices into secrecy it has been forced to take others under its protection. 771

This applies, for instance, to the cult of holy wells, which is, like the worship of stones and the veneration of thorn trees, probably megalithic in origin and seems to carry us back to the sunnier lands of the Mediterranean where the megalithic religion took its rise. It has been calculated that there are some 3,000 holy wells in Ireland: many of them are still visited, generally at the festival seasons which we described in the last chapter, and it is customary for the devotees to tie 312 788 755 778

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

312 strings of beads, rags or bits of clothing in the holy tree which
788 often overhangs the well, so that it may bear their ailments.
755 I happened to come across a well near Cork just after mid-
summer this year. Alongside were the smouldering remains
778 of a great bonfire which had been lit on St. John's Eve.
The visitors to the well, having drunk the water, walked three
times sunwise around the corbelled stone well-cover, and
taking up pebbles kept ready to hand in crevices, they made
the sign of the cross on certain stones which were marked with
deep grooves which generations of patrons had cut by the
same process. Some wells have old "cup-marks" instead
of crosses, and it seems probable that these pagan symbols
were made long ago in the same way as the crosses which
have replaced them. Their round completed, the visitors
[825] looked into the well, for if they were to recover from their
ailments they would see the trout which is reputed to live
there and to show itself only to the cured.

The virtues of these wells are many: they are believed to be efficacious in such varied complaints as eye-disease, lameness, toothache and in some cases barrenness. The first Sunday of each quarter of the Celtic year is generally the visiting time, but perhaps on account of the weather the summer festivals, and especially midsummer, are most popular. Pins and other bits of metal are sometimes deposited in wells. Offerings are also made to certain trees in the form of pins stuck in the bark, each pin representing a wish. Special gatherings known as patterns or pardons were held at such sites on the anniversary of the patron saint of the district. Devotions were followed by dancing and games which often degenerated into fights. It is possible to see relics of paganism in the sanctity of such sites, and it is worth recalling that some of the more celebrated centres of pilgrimage in western Europe, like Santiago da Compostella, seem to have megalithic connexions.

788 The mention of cup-marks brings us to the superstitions
823 concerning the great stone monuments with which they are
778 often associated. A recent article in the *Ulster Journal of*

Archæology (July, 1940) by I. R. Crozier and L. C. Rea, entitled "Bullauns and other Basin-stones," summarizes the various beliefs connected with cup-holes and the larger "bullauns", or stone basins, which the authors suggest were made in the same way by gradual ceremonial attrition. The water which accumulates in these artificial hollows is considered to possess special virtues, for instance as a cure for warts, and offerings of pins and coins are often made in them. It is significant that some of the basins seem to have served as fonts in the early churches. (Fig. III.) Small boulders

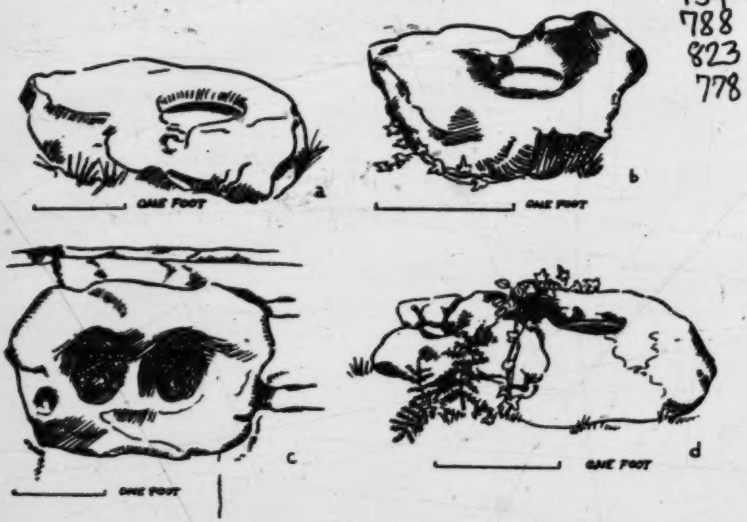

Fig. III. Bullauns.

(*a*) Portmore Church, Co. Antrim.
(*b* & *d*) Aghalee, Co. Antrim (basins on both sides of the same stone).
(*c*) "St. Columba's Font," Londonderry. (Two bullauns and a cup-mark.

lying in certain basin-stones are occasionally employed as cursing stones, the ritual consisting of turning the stones against the sun in their holes—there may be as many as ten in one boulder—at the same time uttering a curse against the offending person,

offending person. Similar stones have been used to work beneficent magic in the case of expectant mothers. Here the symbolism may be that of the child in the womb, but there are other cases where it is obviously phallic. Sympathetic magic would appear to be the explanation of another custom, that of carrying away in a cloth and making into various concoctions, some of which were drunk, the earth from the grave of a holy man. The drink was regarded as a cure for human sins or for disease in cattle.

The megaliths themselves are known to have been held in veneration as givers of fertility and curative agents. The same virtues attach to certain solitary stones, for instance some holy wells have "healing stones" which are used to touch the affected parts of the body. Standing stones with a perforation ("holed-stones") are said to have been used in sealing marriage contracts. Megaliths are also considered the haunts of fairies, which, some students affirm, are to be regarded as ancestral spirits inhabiting the burial places and awaiting an opportunity to be born again. Alternatively it is thought that belief in fairies is a folk memory of ancient peoples of small stature. It is hardly necessary to say that belief in fairies is firmly held in many parts of the country: I have seen quite recently boys dressed in girls' clothes as a protection against fairy theft, for the "wee people" are liable to exchange their "changelings" for healthy boys—a belief which is perhaps an attempt to explain the high mortality of male as compared with female children.

It has more than once been my experience to be refused permission to excavate megalithic monuments from the owner's belief that bad luck would follow. Country people will not touch the trees that grow on ancient burial sites, for instance they will not even use fallen branches as fuel. This reluctance to interfere with the abodes of the dead provides a charitable explanation of the neglect from which many Christian burial grounds suffer. Incidentally it is worth remarking that archæologists have often shown by their discoveries that hazel wood and hazel nuts played a consider-

10: Browne D-5 (1893) 1894
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inishbofin

777 bless it," and any evil or illness happens afterwards, the chances are that the blame will be put on the "bad eye." The evil-eye may be [788] rendered harmless by making the sign of the cross in the name of the Trinity.

754 There is an old woman in Bofin who is considered to be a witch, and is said to be in the habit of putting the "bad eye" on people and on domestic animals.

825 821 There are several beliefs about beasts and birds, such as that the barnacles on the logs of drift wood, which often come ashore, develop into geese, and that a gale of wind may be brought on by the simple expedient of putting a black cat under a pot. Seals are thought to be enchanted men, and will dive if they see a priest or a man in a black coat; their appearance is said to portend bad weather. Who these 825 enchanted men were, and by whom they were placed under the enchantment, I could not ascertain, but the following mention of this belief is made in a footnote by the late Mr. Hardiman, in his edition of O'Flaherty's "H'Iar Connaught" (p. 27):—

"Many traditions, connecting these harmless animals with the marvellous, are related along our western shores. Among these there is one of a curious nature, viz. that at some distant period of time several of the Clan Coneelys (Mac Conġaile), an old family of Iar Connaught, were by "Art magick," metamorphosed into seals! In some places the story has its believers, who would no more kill a seal or eat of a slaughtered one than they would of a human Coneely. It [551] is related as a fact that this ridiculous story has caused several of the clan to change their name to Conolly."

776 Fairies are firmly believed in by many, and one man who is subject to epileptic fits relates long stories of his dealings with them.

Many tales are told about them and their doings, but few of them can be collected by a stranger, as the people are very reticent on the subject. They are supposed to exercise a malign influence on infants, especially before baptism, stealing them if good-looking, and supplying their places with puny, wizened changelings. These are got rid of, and the true child recovered by very simple means; it is only necessary to light a large fire and put on the pot to boil, and then to threaten the changeling that he will be boiled, when he will vanish, and the lost child be found in his place.

[775] Woman who die in childbirth or from puerperal fever are believed to be carried away by the fairies to act as wet-nurses.

776 854 Mrs. Allies informed me that her baby is regularly spat upon by the people when its nurse takes it out, in order to keep off the fairies

11: Browne D-5 (1894) 1895
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Kilmore

the fairies. A few years ago the cattle on this farm became ill, and one after another died; the people of the house consulted a "fairy woman," who told them that the cause of the disease was the defiling of the fairies play-ground, by allowing a manure heap on the south side of the house, but that if this were removed that all would be well. Her advice was taken, and from that day forth the illness ceased. Dirty water should not be thrown out at night for fear of offending the fairies. 776

Many of the old customs mentioned by writers of the earlier part of the century have become extinct. People from the mainland no longer bury their dead on Inishglora, and some other customs connected with this island have died out since it became uninhabited; the first that two people could not go together into one of the ruined cells or cloghans without breaking bread between them, neglect of which would cause one of the two to die within the year; the other that every visitor should kiss the wooden statute of St. Brendan.[1] Though these customs have gone, many still continue to exist—wakes, funeral customs, and straw-boys at weddings have been already mentioned; wren hunting is practised, and the "wran-bush" carried round on St. Stephen's Day, as in most other parts of Ireland. On St. John's Eve bon-fires, or Beltain fires, are lighted, and people used to jump through the smoke over them when they got low; many still endeavour on these occasions to take home a live coal to kindle their own fires with. 178 789

The sign of the cross is made over the mouth when yawning to avert evil. Hair-cuttings are carefully put away in a hole in the wall in order that strength may be preserved. 788 ●

The sale of cattle is completed by dipping a stick in dirt, and marking the beasts therewith. 231 432

Girls sometimes try means of discovering what their future husband will be like. The following is a specimen:—On the first sight of the first new moon of the New Year, the girl kneels down and says seven "Our Fathers" and seven "Hail Marys"; then she takes some of the clay from under her left knee and puts it into a left stocking, which she then buries until retiring at night, when she takes it up and sleeps on it to dream of her future husband. 787

There is a love charm of a rather gruesome character which is still 832

[1] It used to be the custom for all ships passing Inishglora to lower top sails in honour of St. Brendan; and it was believed that any man who thrice lifted the statue in his arms was rendered capable of helping women in difficult labours.—O'DONOVAN.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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234 407 Bad luck could not always be avoided, but at least it was desirable to make the toil less wearisome, and to this end a number of ingenious fittings were applied to the churn staff. Most of the examples I have seen, in the north-east, depend on the recoil of a strong spring to lift the staff, and they may well have been evolved from a spring pole, such as is used for the pole lathe, attached to the roof timbers.[1] Other devices enabled the staff to be moved in both directions by an arrangement of levers hinged to a couple-baulk. These engines, which have almost entirely gone out of use, were known as glaiks (Fig. 31).

[415]

FIG. 31. Glaiks for churning, Co. Down, with milk 'keeler' and piggin, Co. Donegal.

353 788 Here we may mention other things which were hung from the roof timbers: in the more prosperous homes sides of bacon and portions of the autumn-killed ox, the mart; in poorer houses the salted ling or other 'kitchen'. And there was a strange custom of keeping in the roof, to bring luck to the livestock, part of a carcase, such as an animal's leg. This undoubtedly had its origin in the days when living-room and byre were under

[1]For another device, fitted to the churn, see my *Mourne Country*, Fig. 84.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

one roof. A relic of this practice may perhaps be seen in the sheep's bones that one occasionally finds tucked away in the keeping-holes of old-fashioned houses. Above the door the Bridget's Cross gives protection from fire and other dangers.

Besides the churn the old-time farm will have a wide range of other wooden dairying utensils, some stave-built, others carved or turned from the solid. They will include milking-piggins (Fig. 31), cream-skimmers, ladles, butter-scoops, and -prints, butter tubs and buttermilk butts. A shallow stave-built 'keeler' or a large turned bowl is kept for setting milk (Fig. 31). The solid and often shapely carved cups and methers (literally mead bowls) are already archaeological specimens (Fig. 65), and many of the other wooden containers are going the same way, including the little stave noggins described in an earlier chapter.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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to keep an eye on his wealth. The muck-heap is the source of good crops and good luck, a potent symbol of well-being: 'where there is muck there is luck'. It was the custom, recorded for instance in the Glens of Antrim, to stick a sprig of rowan tree upright in the midden on May Eve to protect the farm from mischievous fairies. The muck symbolizes the fertility of the farm.

FIG. 32. Keeping-hole for pots, Co. Down.

In many parts of the country, especially in the northern counties and in Co. Wexford, the entrance to the farmyard is dignified by a pair of massive stone gate piers, generally built-up from field-stones in the form of a conical topped cylinder and kept whitewashed. There are many modern variants in concrete, and the old style piers are steadily disappearing and are often hastened to their end by carelessly driven tractors or lorries. They seem far too massive for the gates they carry, resembling twin bastions defending the entrance to a fortified enclosure (Figs. 5, 33). In some areas, probably under the influence of improving landlords or land agents, field entrances are also dignified by built-up stone piers, and it is possible to explain the fashion as part of the agrarian revolution which resulted in enclosure. In the virtual absence of well-grown oak trees they provided an Irish alternative to the oak gate-post of the English farm, sturdy enough to carry the iron gate which for the same reason took the place of the five-barred oaken gate.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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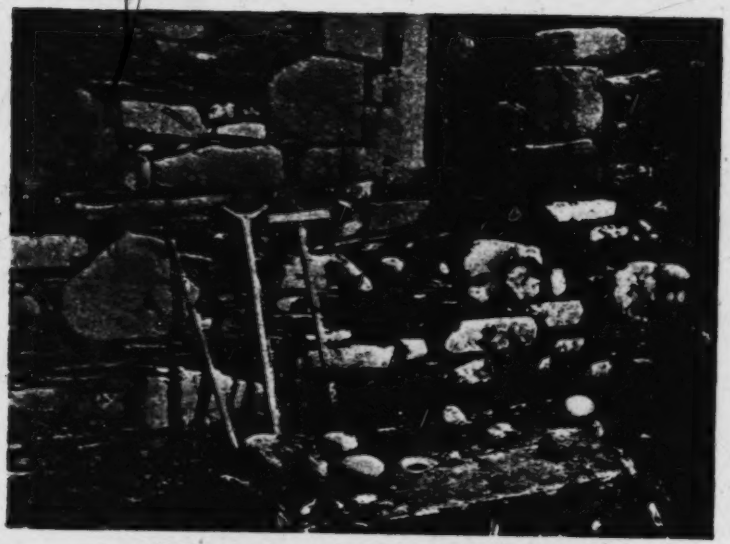

1. Holestone "altar", Inishkeel, Co. Donegal.

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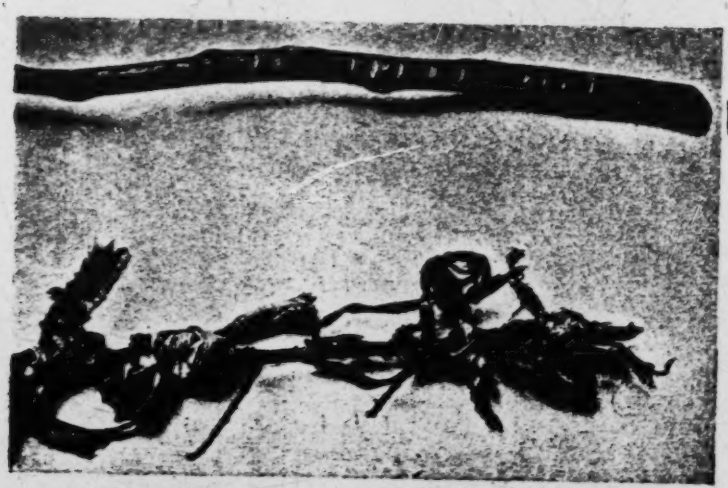
778
[211]



2. *Above*, Pilgrim's prayer-tally, Gouganebarra, Co. Cork.
Below, Rags on bramble at a wart-well.

[facing p.208]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

796 578 of the Pattern of Glendalough in Co. Wicklow was written later in the century. The fights would begin early on the eve of the patron's day, on 23rd June; 'the scene was remarkable, an immense crowd had bivouacked among the ruins (of the seven churches of Glendalough) and were cooking their evening meal, gipsy-wise, throughout the space of the sacred enclosure. Dancing, drinking, thimble-rigging, prick-o'-the-loop and other amusements continued even while the bare-[788] headed venerable pilgrims and bare-kneed voteens were going their prescribed rounds. Towards evening the fun became fast and furious . . . the crowd thickened, sticks were brandished and the faction fight began. It was an unsafe locality unless a stipendiary magistrate and about 100 police could keep the combatants, the Byrnes, Tools and Farrells, etc., separate'.[1]

796 786 Some of the most notorious patterns were connected with holy wells named after a saint but not necessarily located near an old church site. Reading the accounts of witnesses in the early nineteenth century it is hard to believe that religious devotion could be associated with such profanity, but granting that social conditions in the decades before the great famine must have contributed to scenes which the church itself described as 'drunkenness and debauchery', there was, as with the wakes for the dead, a vestige of innocent paganism in the rituals. Some patterns survived their banning by the church and have persisted, stripped of their grosser elements, to this day. The [788] celebrated wells of St. Patrick at Struell in Co. Down, which are still visited by a few pilgrims on St. John's Eve, were the scene of the gathering of great crowds of people and of strange rites until a few years ago. Here as often happened the chief celebration was on the Eve of the Feast of St. John the Baptist and not on the patron saint's day, so that it was not strictly a pattern. Another Midsummer gathering which has often been described is that of St. Ronogue's Well near Cork, which has changed beyond recognition since Mrs. Hall, in 1824, described it as an assembly of 'the worthless and dissipated of the whole county. To the superstitious rites of the morning succeeded the saturnalia of the evening;—the having drunk of the water being considered as a licence for every sort of debauchery . . .

[1]Sir William Wilde, *J.R.S.A.I.* (1873), 449.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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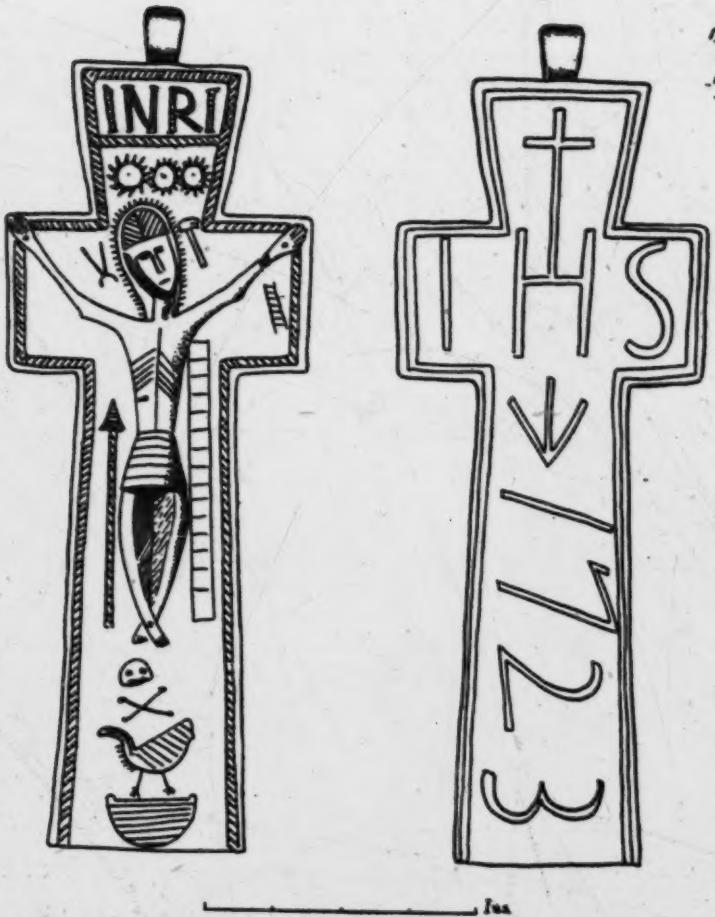

FIG. 84. Portable crucifix ('penal cross'). Found at Hilltown, Co. Down.

dancing, shouting, fiddling, courting, drinking and fighting'.[1] 796
In some celebrated instances the holy wells are associated [786]
with lakes and islands, for example Gouganebarra at the source 788
of the River Lee, and the most famous of all Irish pilgrimages 778

[1]Mr. and Mrs. S. C. Hall, *Ireland: Its Scenery, Character Etc.*, 1, 281.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

is that of St. Patrick's Purgatory, on a small island in Lough Derg in Donegal. Still a powerful attraction, it has been maintained since the early middle ages and has been described, with piety or derision, by innumerable writers since one of the earliest accounts was written by Giraldus Cambrensis, about 1185. The pilgrimage became very popular in the early nineteenth century, when the numbers of visitors are said to have averaged 10,000 annually. Mr. A. T. Lucas has shown that this pilgrimage resulted in the distribution through the country of certain portable wooden crucifixes popularly known as penal crosses.[1] Carved from the solid in a characteristic style, they bear dates between 1700 and 1830 (Fig. 84). It seems that they were sold to pilgrims at Lough Derg and taken home as souvenirs after being used in the devotional ritual. They were a local development, no doubt initiated by some peasant woodcarver, of simple crosses, consisting merely of two sticks tied together, such as are still made at some patterns and occasionally at the festivals of St. Briget and All-Hallows. In this way, as in sanctifying the gatherings themselves, Christianity has taken over the symbols and strength of the elder faiths.

The pilgrimage of Croagh Patrick, in Co. Mayo, is the most celebrated of those held at the end of July, involving the ascent of high mountains and marking, by tradition, the close of summer and the beginning of harvest, as discussed in the following chapter. Here we may quote once more the *Parliamentary Gazetteer* for 1845: 'No place in Ireland is the scene of more superstitious observances, or a more popular resort of pilgrims and devotees, or the site of more numerous small memorials of superstition, or the subject of more generally credited legends of hagiology. Vast crowds of miserable human beings . . . swarm all over its summit and sides and skirts; one grand current legend is almost everywhere believed in the teeth of all credulity, that St. Patrick gathered hither, and swept hence all venomous creatures in Ireland.'

[1] A. T. Lucas, *Co. Louth Arch. Journ.*, 13 (1954), 145–74.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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FIXED FESTIVALS

Easter would take us away from our present subject but mention must be made of some of the folk practices connected with Shrove Tuesday, Ash Wednesday, Easter and Whitsuntide. Shrove Tuesday (Shraft) was a time for hunting the hare, and for feasting in preparation for Lent. A portion of the meat was not eaten but hung in the rafters. It was the great day of the year for marriages, and on that night tricks of many kinds were played on unmarried adults and on courting couples who had not fulfilled their promise. They were serenaded with horn-blowing; animals were tied to the doors of their houses, and cart wheels were rolled down hill. At Ardmore in Co. Waterford a piece of symbolic horseplay was performed by the young men on Ash Wednesday. A hollowed stone with a hole in the centre was the scene of the play. In the hole was stuck a wattle with a handful of tow tied to its top, and unmarried women were made to dance around the stone, holding the tow and spinning while they danced. 'The youths then terminated their amusements by dragging them through the village seated on old logs of wood.'[1]

Good Friday was an important day in the farmer's year, the luckiest day on which to begin the sowing of corn. There was an aversion to the use of iron and to the shedding of blood on Good Friday, which was a favourite day for visiting holy wells and the graves of the dead. Shell-fish were eaten, and visits to the shore were enlivened with games and horse-racing. On Easter Day the young folk would be up early in the morning to see the sun dance, and during the day vast quantities of eggs were consumed. The colouring and rolling of eggs are customs kept up by children in many districts. A special Easter Day dance, for which the prize was a large cake exhibited on a garlanded churn-staff, is popularly supposed to have given rise to the expression 'taking the cake', in the sense of beating all comers. If Easter was a lucky time, ominous superstitions attached to Whitsuntide, for example persons born at that time were supposed to have the evil eye, to be fated to die a violent death, or to take a life. A chicken would sometimes be killed in the hands of a Whitsun child to serve as a substitute slaughter. To cross water or go to sea at Whitsun was to invite death by drowning.

[1] E. Fitzgerald, *J.R.S.A.I.* (1856), 48.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

known instances when a branch accidentally broken from a fairy thorn was carefully tied back in position.

The policy of the Church was to attach new myths to old rites, but only occasionally has the thorn tree been nominally won over to Christianity by dedication to local saints or by its association with sacred sites, with wells or Lammas celebrations, as for example the Criocan Thorn in the heart of Slieve Bloom.[1] On the other hand well-worship has had less stubborn roots, and 'holy water' has been more readily absorbed into Christian ritual. Nearly all the holy wells have close associations with the saints. Over 3,000 examples have been listed, most of them now half forgotten, others visited in secret and a declining number openly resorted to for cures. It is not difficult to understand the universal attraction of a spring of pure water. In the eyes of countryfolk a sense of mystery attaches to the upwelling of a spring well: it is considered lucky to have access to such a source of domestic water—a true 'well', not a hole bored in the ground—and one is invariably told that the local well yields the purest water for miles around, or even 'in all Ireland'. The attributes of purification, healing and fertility are natural concomitants of the magic welling of spring water, but besides possessing supernatural powers of this kind the holy wells are regarded as having had miraculous origins. The most famous sites where patterns are held have already been mentioned: the local holy well is rather an ever-present source of healing resorted to in need. One cannot but think of an ancient cult of waters springing from deep sources in primitive religion which was reinforced and adapted by successive intrusive cultures from the megalithic to the Christian (Pl. 16).

The ritual of 'paying rounds' at a well frequently involves associated stones and trees. A sunwise circuit of the well is made and the pilgrim, after taking a drink from the well, hangs a rag or a rosary on an adjacent bush. The ritual commonly includes also tracing with a pebble on a stone of the well-covering the mark of a cross which has been incised by countless other pebbles. This practice has a bearing on the mysterious cup-marked stones and basin-stones (bullauns) which are associated with numerous ritual sites, including wells, for I

[1] V. Cornish, *Historic Thorn Trees in the British Isles*, 53.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

believe that many examples were ground out in much the same way before the sign of the cross replaced that of the circle. Cup-marked stones are commonly found in megalithic graves, on standing stones and Bronze Age cists, both in the British Isles and further afield. Some of the larger bullauns were certainly mortars, and very similar 'knocking stones' were used until recent times for preparing barley meal by pounding the grain with a beetle or maul (Fig. 90). To judge from the frequency with which one finds a knocking stone in the ruins of an old clachan it was one of the communal possessions of such a settlement. Old specimens, more especially when the basins are sunk in an outcrop of rock, are frequently found to hold water, and they are then regarded as 'wells', the water being held efficacious as a cure for warts. That such rock-basins have magic powers is illustrated by the following reference to a site in Scotland. On the Loch Avon side of Cairngorm is a shelving rock bearing hand-made basins about a foot wide and correspondingly deep: 'sitting on them is said to be efficacious in cases of barrenness.'[1]

Fig. 90. Knocking stone and bullaun. Both Co. Antrim.

It is an interesting illustration of the pagan associations of cup-marks, and of the success of the symbol of the cross, that their use survived in folk practice only as cursing stones. Smooth pebbles resting in certain stone basins are turned three times against the sun. There are many examples in the west, some

[1] A. Mitchell, *The Past in the Present*, 265.

14: Westropp B-4, 5 (no date)1910-12
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

776 Croaghan, and Celts such as Lachtna (A.D. 820-840), and Brian
538 Boru (A.D. 980-1014). In one notable instance, King Conor (A.D. 1242-69) is the reputed builder of the great stone fort of Dun Conor in Aran, which in the eleventh-century legend is evidently connected with Conchiurn or Conchraed the Firbolg,—a relation accepted in 1685 by Roderic O'Flaherty, although he called its hero "Conquevar" (*i.e.* Chonchobhar or Conor). Any modern allusion to the Danann is therefore "suspect." Many visits to the recesses of the hills in Burren from 1878 onwards,—and I may add that
776 the same is true of the rest of Clare,—only gave me, in 1905, one
788 direct reference to the Danann.[a] At the natural moat crowned
823 by the small stone ring wall of Croaghateeaun, near Lisdoonvarna, we were told to cross ourselves as a protection against the Danann. The place was, nevertheless, undoubtedly regarded by the older people living near it as a most dangerous fairy fort, and we were told how certain badger hunters,—(who brought drink with them), —after a long festival on its summit got benighted there; they eventually returned home sobered by fright, as they suddenly "saw the whole fleet" of "them" coming up the mound, and escaped only just in time.

776 The "whirlwinds" along dusty roads and sudden gusts were
788 not long ago everywhere supposed to be caused by the progress of
821 fairy beings. The older folk believed, and trembled,—crossing themselves, or saying a word of prayer,—while the younger folk, more than half in jest, raised their hats, as is still sometimes done to the unlucky "single magpie" and the weasel.

776 I know of two cases of reputed changelings. My second sister, whose delicacy, when an infant, excited remark, was, about 1842, taken out by a servant to be exposed on a shovel on the doorstep at Carnelly. The angry and hasty intervention of another servant saved the child, but the would-be "exposer" was convinced of the propriety of her attempt "to get back the real child" from the fairies. A very old woman, Kate (Geerin) Molony, a henwife at Maryfort, near Tulla, whom I faintly remember in 1869, was many years before anxious about her little daughter's failing health, and went to a "wise woman," who assured her that the child was "changed." She spoke of this on her return, and unfortunately

[a] Apart from Lon, at Slievnaglasha, and the "hags."

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

fireplace has a profound psychological significance in Inis Beag and, in a sense, is a force drawing the family together. Now that only three hookers transport peat from the mainland—when in the past there had been more than a hundred—and the price of turf increases considerably year by year, coal or bottled gas stoves are being used by most families. Although coal and gas are cheaper to burn, and coal throws out more heat than turf, the coal fire in the hearth does not foster camaraderie as does the peat fire. The replacement of fireplace by stove and the "stink" and dirtiness of coal are denounced incessantly by the islanders, and the disappearance of the "sweet smell" of burning sods and a multitude of customs associated for generations with the peat fire are lamented.

Many functions are served by "the room." It can accommodate the displaced parents after their son has married, if all agree, for it has a bed which can serve them (as well as distinguished guests, spectators at parties, and now tourists and summer language school students). This chamber is the best kept of the house, with the newest and most valuable of the furniture and often a linoleum floor, and its walls and ceiling are whitewashed or painted frequently. Family heirlooms and objects of sentimental value, which are parted with only as a last resort, are found here. Religious pictures adorn the walls, and on the mantel over the fireplace are photographs of the family going back generations, especially of those who have emigrated or are deceased. When "the stations" are performed every two decades in the cottage, the mass is read in "the room," and certain rubrics used in this ritual are afterward kept here. Finally, the chamber serves as a dance floor when the crowd at a party in the house overflows the bounds of kitchen, hall, and street.

The social universe of the islanders is divided into four segments: close kin or "friends" (Previously, I have used this word in the American sense.), distant kin or "those I have a relationship with," other islanders, and outsiders or strangers. "Friends" normally extend generationally to include ego's parents, grandparents, children, and grandchildren, and collaterally to include his affines (spouse's kinsmen), siblings, and first, second, and third cousins—termed, respectively, "four-of-kin," "six-of-kin," and "eight-of-kin."[1] With the intensification of inbreeding, most of the folk are eight-of-kin, and this is why the parish priest examines the genealogies of families at the time of the match. Marriage between first cousins is forbidden, between second cousins demands permission from the bishop, and between third the consent of the parish priest. Distant kin are relatives extended collaterally beyond eight-of-kin, while outsiders include the curates, teachers who are not islanders, lighthouse keepers, the Dane, tourists of local renown, and, as I have just indicated, even in-marrying women and descendants of recently arrived immigrants (also, of course, inquisitive anthropologists).

Although inheritance and succession are patrilineal on the island, descent is bilateral—traced through both agnatic (father's) and uterine (mother's) lines --with a strong agnatic bias.

[1] These positions are pictured horizontally (generationally) and vertically (collaterally) in block form in Arensberg and Kimball 1940:96 in the chapter "Kinship System." The Irish kinship system is common to peoples of Western Europe and America (the Eskimo type), and much of the kinship information reported by Arensberg and Kimball applies to Inis Beag.

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779 The islanders know little of church dogma and the purport of rituals and feast days. What knowledge they do possess often is distorted, and they seldom read the Bible or manuals of instruction or engage in doctrinal discussions among [122] themselves. I discovered by consulting priests and church histories, dictionaries, [123] and exegeses—both before and during my stay in Inis Beag—that I came to know far more about the faith than any of the folk, and I sometimes imparted what I had learned to the curious in homes and even in the pubs. Instruction is welcomed by the islanders, but they dislike criticism from any quarter of their idiosyncratic Catholic observances, pagan retentions and reinterpretations, and non-Christian behavior. They also dislike being told, especially by returned emigrants, that "Catholic culture" in Ireland is quite unlike that in other parts of the world and arouses dismay and even incredulity in many foreign Catholics who visit Ireland.

771 The paths to salvation, according to the islanders, are threefold: obeying
793 the curate, performing the rituals of the church diligently and punctiliously, and
776 conforming to the moral laws of Christianity. Being saved, however, is to them
165 much more a matter of escaping Hell than of achieving Purgatory and eventually Heaven, and they experience more anxiety about failing to conform to the moral laws than pride in conforming to them. Furthermore, it is sins of thought rather than sins of deed which preoccupy them. While they boast of their morality as expressed in behavior, they labor under a heavy burden of guilt arising out of repressed sexual desires, jealousy and envy of their neighbors, and anti-clerical sentiment, among other attitudes. It is difficult for most of them to confess these to the priest, and thus their feelings of guilt and fear of damnation are compounded. Many times in Inis Beag I heard a "good Catholic" defined as one who "thinks mostly of death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell" and guides his conduct accordingly. Life on earth is regarded as merely a brief prelude to the "eternity stretching beyond the grave," to be lived only in preparation for the Day of Judgment and borne patiently in all its "pain and suffering." Priests and nuns are envied for many reasons, among them the fact that they can "spend most of their time preparing for death" and thus are in a better position to achieve salvation.

771 It is apparent to outside observers and to the folk alike that women are
562 more pious than men. They attend church more regularly, are more serious of
[829] mien at mass and during other religious observances, and are more prone to talk
• [788] of religious matters than men. Many women go to mass daily, and it is said that all of the women of the island, but only ten men, have evaded going to Hell magically by attending mass nine Fridays in succession after Ash Wednesday (or, according to some, the first Friday in each month for nine successive months, or [154] the first Friday after Ash Wednesday for nine years in succession). The reasons for this are several, but the most important are that women are less contented than men and thus have a greater need for the solace that religion affords, and they are more restricted socially than men and by fulfilling various church obligations can escape household confinement and interact with other women. Some
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828 islanders are thought to be overly pious—"wear their religion on their sleeves"—and are subjects of amusement and derision; those who use piety to cloak avarice

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796 to put their property in a state of good repair, which, in retrospect, is regarded as a benefit, however much they might have complained of the labor involved during the previous weeks.

778 The sacred well, probably appropriated from the Druids 13 centuries ago, [174] still attracts the folk and occasionally pilgrims from Inis Thiar and other islands. [184] On the mainland, patterns often were associated with holy wells named after saints, but this does not seem to have been the case in Inis Berg. It was customary [178] until about ten years ago for those who came to pray here to attach bits of cloth, [798] rosaries, or sacred objects obtained from holy places of pilgrimage on the mainland and abroad, but this practice was halted by the clergy as smacking of pagan- • [788] ism. Now it is visited for religious purposes mostly by small groups on Sunday afternoon, and by persons about to emigrate and their families who come to pray [789] for the good fortune of the soon departed. The water in the spring is not considered [755] holy, but capable of "bringing the grace of God and the saint," and if it is drunk during prayer, it is believed to be especially efficacious for curing sterility, among other afflictions. In this century, a partially blind islander is believed to have regained his sight after paying nine visits to the well on successive Sundays, and [789] other miraculous cures from earlier times are reported. Those who come to the spring always seek a tiny fish or eel in the water, which, if observed, is merely a good omen to some but an assurance of reaching Heaven to others. Attaching rags to the well and seeking cures and omens there are all examples of reinterpretation. [312] The spring also is used as a source of water by farmers who pasture stock in nearby fields and by thirsting passersby.

Pagan Supernaturalism

771 Pagan supernaturalism is disavowed by the folk, and it is difficult to know 798 how widely held are beliefs in this sphere. That they are held is indisputable, as 178 attested by the active efforts of curates up to this day to eradicate them. Youth of [743] the island overtly deny the existence of other than church approved spiritual en- [787] tities, although the most outspoken disclaimer of paganism among them is visited occasionally by the ghost of his father, who urges the continuation of a family feud. But elders cling tenaciously to indigenous beliefs and practices, about which they are extremely secretive for fear of being ridiculed by outsiders and their more skeptical fellows. Defensive about being labeled backward, the islanders feel that [829] the "superstitions" they are said to hold most contribute to this impression. When the folk talk of pagan retentions and reinterpretations, they ascribe them to those who lived at the time that their parents or grandparents did, or to certain of their [776] superstitious contemporaries. A notorious dissenter, who sometimes has occasion to patrol the shores of Inis Beag before dawn, antagonizes his neighbors by deriding them for their fear of venturing after dark to the back of the island, where [115] fairies and ghosts hold sway. On telling him of my intention to spend a night [776] resting atop a *clochán* near the Atlantic coast, he said, "The only thing that will happen is you'll hear the cocks crow in the morning." He is the only person who admitted to me that he disbelieves the teachings of the church concerning the soul